7: Thompson--373 J-4 (no date) 1937 Laotians
177, 534

"The few instruments that exist, notably the khène, are of Malayan or Chinese origin."

10: d'Orleans--280 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 534

"In the square, a man is holding one of the Laotian bamboo instruments that resemble an organ; this one is two yards long, and the artist produces from it sweet solemn notes, which mingle with some faint songs. The listeners accompany the music by striking one hand against the palm of the other; instead of following the rhythm in three time used in Central Asia and amongst the Mussulmans, the clapping here continues uniformly and regularly. It is more monotonous."

10: d'Orleans--287 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 286, 301, 462, 534

"As soon as we are fairly in Mekong, we stop on the left bank for luncheon, near a small village hidden among the cocoa-trees. A good road traverses it, and leads to the pagoda; the women are working at the cotton, carding it with a sort of small bow, spinning and weaving it; the children impress me by the fairness of their skin; a great many wear bracelets on their feet. Hanging in the courtyard of the pagoda, I notice a bell at least two yards long, made from the hollow trunk of a tree, it is struck every morning and evening."

10: d'Orleans--351-352 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 521, 527, 534, 832

[LSS: during the Ngones ceremonies which are part of the Laotian New Year celebration.] "Facing the girls were seated one or two groups of young men playing upon the guitar, the tam-tam and a sort of Laotian organ made of bamboo. Several of them are singing, but when they do so they put a corner of their scarf over their head so as not to be seen, while others take up the chorus. While the singing is in progress, conversation is allowed to go on between the young men and the girls, each of [352] the former taking up his place opposite the girl of his fancy. This goes on until two in the morning, being much like the flirtation of other countries, with this difference that there is no dancing and that conversation with the unmarried girls is more free than with married women."

10: d'Orleans--353 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 534

"The orchestra is reinforced by flute players, their instrument consisting of a simple bamboo cane pierced with holes and having at one end a notch upon which the player rests his upper lip."

10: d'Orleans--354-355 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 292, 534, 644

[LSS: During the New Year celebration in Luang Prabang.]

"With the Laos soldiers, preceded by six trumpeters, comes the guard dressed in yellow tick and wearing round caps, striped blue and white. The [355] standard of Luang Prabang is white, with a particoloured dragon like that of China, while a second white flag with a red border, upon which can be traced the outlines of an elephant, must be Siamese.

The soldiers are followed by the musicians and certain instruments, such as the drums and the cymbals, are placed upon a wooden square which is suspended by ropes from the shoulders of several bearers, the player marching in the centre. Then come more soldiers, naked to the waist, sword-bearers, lance-bearers, and cane-bearers, the canes being tied up with some red material in bundles.

Last of all comes the king, seated upon a very small gilt throne with no dome to it and borne by eight men, facing the king being two children on their knees. He is wearing a small white jacket, a silken langouti and a rather dirty old gray helmet, with an European sunshade in his hand; the rear guard is formed by young Laotians, intoxicated with tchoum-tchoum, many of them bearing upon their faces marks of the mud thrown by the young girls."

25: Brodrick--100 S-3 (1939) 1948 Laotians
116, 273, 527, 534, 541

"In May is the Feast of Fireworks, that begins with a decorous temple service and then, after nightfall, the big drums start to throb. All night long men hammer at the buffalo-hide tambours, breaking off only to make the rounds of the village where, at each house, they drink rice-alcohol, and so the Firework Festival goes on, with rockets whizzing in the sky and the bass drums rumbling, a holiday of drunkenness and gaiety prolonged for three whole days.

The Festival of the Great Waters, in July, is not unlike that in Cambodia, but more spontaneous and fairy-like. Then there is the Cake Feast in October and then at the Hunter's Moon, the Festival of the Great Oath.

These are some of the official court festivals in the realm of Luang-Prabang, but the local, village feasts are more revealing of the Laotian as he is. The Courts of Love, singing all night long, and the funerals..."

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

403 electricians hugged each other, and, enchanted by the din, the
527 audience began to drift away from the theatre and make for the dancing floor.

527 The second attraction in order of popularity was a love-court. A
584 quadrangular arrangement of tables had been formed, covered by a
782 thatched roof raised on posts decorated with woven bamboo
793 representations of animals, weapons and phallic emblems. Seated round the tables in the interior of the square were the girls, and their suitors sat facing them. Between the couples had been placed offerings of food, brought by the girls. Originally a tribute to some ancient, forgotten fertility god, a primeval Thai Venus, the offerings would be given, next day, to the bonzes. All through the night the bantering of witticisms, the singing and the exchange of improvised verse would go on, accompanied by the accordion-like
● [534] wheezings of the Kène, the Stone Age gourd pipes of Laos. Sometimes through a happy fault in the circuit the splutter and bellow of the loud-speakers would suddenly lapse, and you heard the beehive dronings of the communal love-making, the kènes, and the voice of the presiding bonze, preaching continually in an archaic, incomprehensible language from the wicker cage into which he had been fastened. The cage symbolized the protection of his religion from these earthly distractions. As soon as inspiration failed he would be relieved by the next on the rota of preachers, waiting now to take his place.

584 Love-courts are the accepted preliminary to the consummation of
[533] affairs of the heart, which — despite European conviction that
576 romantic love is a Western invention — are accompanied in Laos by much versifying and mild, self-imposed frustrations. When, for instance, a well-known beauty is wooed by a number of suitors, a serenading match may be arranged on the veranda of her house to permit her to test under competitive conditions the poetic and musical capabilities of each of them. Complete pre-marital freedom
[836] is recognized, but much outward reserve is maintained. There is a time and place for everything. It is incorrect, for example, to

Era of prosperity. It is a certain fact that the country was perfectly happy at this time. Feeling protected by a dreaded sovereign, the Laotians cultivated their native unconcern which resulted at once from the moderate nature of their /119/ desires and from the fertility of their soil. Living without any dire needs, all things were for them a ground for rejoicing, and their peaceful character naturally inclined them towards the satisfactions of the spirit and particularly towards music which constitutes the purest manifestation thereof (1). 175*

1. Cf. M. Galerne, Courrier musical, 1925.

Music in Lan-Xang. They therefore held song in special favor and mingled it with dances whose expressive mimicry was related to the pantomime dances of India. The plots were based almost exclusively on love, which Laotians took pleasure in exalting under its most variegated aspects. They sometimes took the form of charming "courts of love" which remind one of those held in our French provinces in the Middle Ages, were sometimes given on the occasion of funeral ceremonies which were in no way envisaged in the same atmosphere of sadness as they are among us, or sometimes on the occasion of the inauguration of a pagoda, the construction of a house or the harvesting of a crop. 533 535

The khene. In all these circumstances either instrumental or vocal music had a place. /120/ The most common instrument was the khene, which is still widely used today. The khene is "formed of a series of bamboo tubes which are small in diameter, of various decreasing lengths and arranged in pairs, like two large pipes of Pan, usually in seven consecutive rows. The bamboo tubes are joined together by two half-gourds, fastened with wax, which form an air chamber and are provided with a small circular orifice which serves as a mouthpiece. Inside the bamboo tubes are pierced by holes, some of which let the air in, while the others are blocked with the fingers as the need arises in order to obtain notes, while the palm of the hand grasps the curve of the half-gourd. The air which elicits the notes strikes against metal reeds which are inserted in the upper part of each bamboo tube (1). 534

1. Cf. M. Galerne; Courrier musical, 1925.

534 "The oddest thing about the functioning of the khene is the simultaneity of several notes and their absolute continuity. This results from the fact that air can pass, depending on the fingering, through several tubes at the same time, and that the player breathes in and out by turns. . . . The sounds of the khene, whose /121/ combinations are based on the chief 'harmonics,' are very sweet and are in between those of the harmonium and those of the accordion (1).

1. M. Galerne, op. cit.

"With the khene there was a series of secondary instruments also made of bamboo -- a large flute, a flute with a reed or kind of flageolet, and a flute with a single hole. The orchestra was completed by the ranavastron (2), the gong, the gong-vong or sort of

2. The ranavastron is found in all the countries of the Far East. Invented in Ceylon, it is the ancestor of all instruments played with a bow.

xylophone with a double circular sector, cymbals, a tom-tom and finally bells which were primarily designed to ward off the evil 'Phis.'

533 "As for vocal muxic, it manifested itself in singsong recitatives or choral chants with fascinating musical lines." Even today, thanks to the "French peace," groups of boys and girls, their heads garlanded with flowers, can be seen walking in the villages on moonlit nights and repeating refrains with a harmonious rhythm in unison after verses which have a narrative quality and are usually improvised by the soloist (3).

3. The scale such as we conceive of it does not exist in Laotian music. One nevertheless has the sensation of three distinct "modes": one which has no thirds or sevenths, another which lacks only sevenths, and a third which has a diatonic appoggiatura in fifths. (Cf. M. Galerne, op. cit. /Courrier musical, 1925/.)

/122/ Three distinct characteristic rhythms can be counted: the Love Song which is improvised or handed down by tradition from generation to generation; the Pirogue-men's Song which has

149: Reinach--1b G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

534

Fig. 2 [p. 1]. Laotian musicians and dancers.

764 the fire collapsed. In a great shower of sparks, in the middle of a
787 long blue flame, the coffin tottered and fortunately leaned to the right side. The dead man's spirit was satisfied, and it was also an excellent omen for the prosperity of the Muong.

764 [214] Now the pyre, the catafalque, the coffin, the corpse and all were nothing more than an immense live fire, an incandescent mass which projected bizarre flashes on the motley crowd and gave to it, in the evening twilight beside the great river, a phantasmagorical air.

From time to time one of the posts of the canopy could be seen in the center of the fire, rising towards the sky like a gigantic torch. The coffin toppled, and for the space of a second the corpse seemed to appear grimacing and twisting in the middle of the flames, like a salamander.

The whole fire fell in, and the crackling noises lessened. Two or three tongues of flame shot out here and there, only to be extinguished immediately. The coals finished burning themselves out, and soon nothing was left of the pyre and of the whole edifice, so bizarrely decorated, but a pile of gray ashes in the middle of which a few whitish and incompletely burned bone fragments could still be seen. With night the last gleams of the pyre disappeared, the last coals went out and the only light remaining was that of the twinkling stars.

Early the next day the bonzes went to the spot where the pyre had stood. They collected the ashes which had been cooled by dew during the night and then, after throwing a few handfuls to the four winds, they used the rest to draw a crude human face on the ground. The few whitish bones which were still left and which crumbled at the touch were collected and placed in a jar of ordinary earth, which would be buried in the enclosure of a pagoda at the foot of a sacred "ficus."

[585] Later on, since the deceased had been well-to-do and his family was wealthy, the latter would be helped by the people of the province to build a brick pyramid called "That" inside the pagoda enclosure.

A few ashes in an urn and, in some, the memory of a great celebration and a few good meals...and that is all that remained of the man who had long been a great leader in his province.

533 Music. "Instrumental music holds a place of honor in Laos.
534 The instruments are few in number, and are of Malayan and Chinese origin.

534

"The most common of these instruments (the kène or Laotian organ) is a sort [215] of Pan's pipe of a peculiar shape, a kind of organ in which the wind is supplied by the lungs. A series of bamboo pipes of very small diameter (10 to 12 millimeters) placed two by two and juxtaposed until there are as many as ten or twelve in all, are joined together at a point some 25 or 30 centimeters from the bottom of the instrument by a wooden collar provided with a mouthpiece. Each pair of pipes is longer than the pair preceding it, and the bottoms of all the pairs are aligned. The pipes are hollow from one end to the other and communicate with the frame member, which serves the function of a bellows, through holes which cannot be seen. Just above the frame each tube is pierced by a hole on its outer face (the two shortest ones are also pierced just above the mouth of the frame, on the narrow side of the instrument).

"To play the instrument, the musician brings the mouthpiece to his lips. With both hands held flat and his fingers placed over the holes, he holds the instrument in a nearly vertical position. The musician blows, and by using his fingers as he would on the holes of a flute he obtains sounds which remind one of those of the harmonium.

"The smallest of these instruments measure from forty to fifty centimeters in height, while some are as much as three meters in height.

"The flageolet, the small flute without a key, the Chinese violin with a long handle mounted on a gourd which serves as a sounding box, the cymbals without a key, the bass drum, the tambourine, the gong, the xylophone (a harmonica with wooden sounding-bars) and finally the piano-gong (kong-vong) are the principal instruments. The latter instrument merits a description. The frame is circular, taking the form of a horseshoe, and consists of two concentric galleries 25 centimeters in height, with an outer diameter of one to 1.2 meters and an inner diameter of eighty centimeters to a meter. On this frame sixteen small gongs are mounted flat along the top, like stones in a necklace. The gongs bulge out in the center, and each of them has a different pitch so that they form an irregular scale, at least by our musical standards. To play the instrument the musician stands in the center, leaving the opening through which he entered the circle behind him. In each hand he holds a striker shaped like a thick, flat mushroom, the handle of which is wooden and the head formed by a disk of elephant hide from one to 1.2

534 meters in diameter. By striking the gongs with these two hammers or brushing against the gongs with them, musicians succeed in playing certain local airs which, although their sounds are somewhat sharp to the ear, are nonetheless harmonious at a distance.

"These various instruments are frequently joined together to form orchestras which play in comparative harmony.

533 "There is no method of musical notation. Memory and routine are the performers' only guides. Their memory is adequate enough and their mastery of the instruments sufficient to provide their listeners with a fairly varied repertory." (Le Laos français.)

[216] Songs and singers. Songs and improvisations enjoy a great vogue in Laos, and are an obligatory feature of every feast and every ceremony. They also serve to keep up the spirits of boatmen and to break the monotony of traveling.

Talents as singers and improvisers are generally shared by both sexes. The same person will often have both these abilities, which are to some extent the heritage of certain families.

538 The songs consist of poems which form a kind of anthology or "Folk-Lore" of the land. Everyone knows some snatches of these
533 stories, which they hear over and over again without tiring of them and which are handed down intact or embellished with new parts from parents to their children and from the old to the young.

The improvisations are recitatives in the vulgar tongue or in Siamese which are composed according to circumstances. Certain songs are delivered in a language unknown to the Laotians, but which they repeat like the litanies of Buddhism with, so to speak, a ritual cadence and intonation.

Singers and improvisers of both sexes are called Mô-Lam or Mô-Kab-Lam, and the poems which they recite are called Kam-Kong. These artists are very well trained and are capable of singing aloud for twelve hours at a stretch without showing any trace of fatigue or lassitude, whereas even the hardiest kene players cannot blow on their instruments for more than about an hour.

Love stories, invocations, inspirations, memories, news items, legends, prophecies, voyages, catastrophes, etc. are all matters for improvisation. All these songs are arranged, amplified or distorted to suit the particular turn of mind, the fancy, the spirit or the merriment of the author and to suit the occasion and the moment.

538 With his somewhat caustic but not malicious verve, the improviser excels in mixing the modern with the ancient. He takes particular

village and those of ancestors. Prayers for the dead are said, and 782
when they are over the head and feet of a goat, crude clay statuettes 769
representing two men, two buffalo and two oxen, and numeroux wax
candles are placed on a raft made of banana trees. The raft is
launched full into the current of a river while men collect on the
banks and fire salvos of shots and shoot off fireworks.

The musical instruments of the Thais are the "Kene" and [240] 534
a kind of clarinet with two tubes, reinforced by gongs and tom-toms.

Their songs are not at all noisy and are much more like mono- 538
tonous chants.

The Thais have a very characteristic game, and this is the game 524
of the "inexhaustible jar." A jar of rice beer is placed on the floor
of a house and five bamboo tubes stuck in it to serve as straws. Five 273
men take positions around the jar, and each of them puts a tube in
his mouth. Into each of the jars, and above a kind of porous stopper
made of pressed paddy husks, water is poured by means of an ox
horn with a hole in the end. At a given signal both men and women
begin to suck conscientiously while the contents of the ox horn are
poured into each jar three times in succession. The ones who empty
their jar first win, and the losers have to drink the contents of ten
horns of water poured over what is left of the beer in their jar.

The Thai beer does not have a bad taste, and its alcoholic
strength is equivalent to that of hard cider, which it closely resembles
in flavor. Although the additions of water decrease the beverage's
percentage of alcohol it nevertheless produces a slight intoxication,
due primarily to the speed with which it is sucked through the straw.
But the inebriety never degenerates into a quarrel, and provokes
nothing but laughter, songs and unadulterated merriment.

Who would believe that the Thais have the custom of throwing 527
"confetti"? Nothing is more true, however, for in the celebrations
at the end of harvest, which take place in December or January,
the merrymakers throw cotton seeds mixed with paddy, with husks,
and sometimes also with ashes.

101 [261] [Illustration] [262] [Blank page] [263] As far as marriages, deaths, etc. go, we find practically the same customs among the Kha tribes of southern Laos as among their fellows in northern Laos.

231 It should be noted that the Rades breed a variety of small horses
439 which are highly prized in Annam, Laos and Siam.

[533] "These Khas love music and dancing. Their favorite instruments are gongs and bells.

534 "A set of gongs consists of seven, nine or twelve single ones. Made of copper and often very beautiful, these gongs take the shape of a cylinder from forty to eighty centimeters in diameter, only one end of which is closed by a vibrating plate. The cap worn by our judges and professors, although on a smaller scale, gives a fairly clear idea of the shape of these instruments. A few of the instruments are artfully cast and ornamented with much elegance. There is a solid ring about a third of the way along the gong's length which is part and parcel with the rest of the gong and makes it possible to hang it up on a side of the house, at about the height of a man's head, by means of a rattan thong fastened to the frame.

"The performers stand facing the battery and pummel it with their fists, taking care to strike the vibrating plate in the center so that it will emit a true tone. This procedure produces perfect musical notes, which are accompanied by the dull resonances of the tom-toms and the sharp sonorities of the bells made of a copper and tin alloy. The gongs bring a high price, and when it is a fine one a complete series is worth from 1,200 to 1,500 francs.

"In some villages the performers each take an instrument and hold it in a sling fastened to their shoulder, then form a column in single file. This Indian-style procession marches from the center of the house towards one of its extremities, striking more and more gently as it moves away from its point of departure. . Then it returns to the center, unleashing a compensating crescendo. The maneuver begins again towards the other end of the house, and the musical promenade continues until the musicians are exhausted.

535 "When the Khas begin to play and perform the Kimlang (a very
272 stirring war dance) and the warriors grow excited from dancing and
579 from drinking rice wine, it is wise to make them stop as soon as they begin to pick up their weapons, for when drunk with alcohol and enflamed with ardor they are no longer masters of themselves.

714 "War dress includes feathers in the hair and a sort of cross of Saint Andrew formed of cloth rolled and crossed on the chest. Weapons, quivers, arrows, crossbows, bucklers, spears and swords complete their equipment.

Meo

[197]

The Meos have several dialects in their particular language.

534 Their musical instruments are reduced to two: a kind of bagpipe resembling the Laotian organ, but in which the frame is metal and the sounds sharper; and a smaller instrument which is nearly identical with the toy known in France as a jew's-harp.

535 To the accompaniment of their instruments, the Meos dance something reminiscent of the bear dance. (Le Laos français, 1900, Schneider, Hanoi.) [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), Notice sur le Laos français.]

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824
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149: Reinch--417 G-3 (no date) 1901 AMI Indochina
Lawdans AM8

Mai-tieu		12	.5 to .6	Same as above.	Yes	Forest glades	Lower Laos	Very soft wood, white, slightly grayish, of inferior quality, cannot withstand rain; fine grain; well-grown tree. Lasts about 7 years.
Mai-koung		15	.6 to .8	Boards and traverse beams. The dried leaves are used to make pirogue roofs and partitions for Laotian houses.	Yes	Forest glades	Lower Laos	Fairly hard wood, slightly reddish, well-grown; plentiful.
Mai-kha-thang		25 to 30	.25 to .3	Beams	Yes	Forest glades	Lower Laos	Hardwood, slightly yellowish, plentiful, quite well-grown.
Mai-tong		35	.5	Coffin planks.	Yes	Forest glades	Lower Laos	Softwood, white, acid fruit; plentiful.
Mai-keng-seng		15	.6	Planks, studs for partition walls and doors.	Yes	Valleys and banks of water-courses	Lower Laos	Softwood, heartwood dark red; plentiful in the valleys.
Mai-man-pa		15	.25	House columns.	No	Thick forest	Lower Laos	Hard and resistant wood, grayish-yellow, fairly easy to work; plentiful, unlimited life.
Mai-hat	Cai-xoai (Annamite)	25	.4	Wooden bells, mediocre traverse beams and columns; little used in building.	No	Valleys and banks of water-courses	Lower Laos	Rather unresistant, yellowish-white wood; plentiful, unlimited life.

[table continued over]

588 inscriptions, some of which go back to the fourteenth century and are [172] in the Laotian language. For the earlier period we have seen above that these inscriptions were either in Sanskrit or in Khmer (Cf. Stele of Sayfong, appendix: Vientiane).

Music

533 Laotian songs belong to the field of poetry and are of two kinds:
538 the one consists of poems celebrating the exploits of legendary heroes,
883 transmitted from father to child, from master to pupil, and often expanded by imaginary improvisations; the others embroider the love theme.

[86] Alternate chants are used, particularly in the courts of love. A young girl sings, a boy answers. These songs have become a traditional game whose social function has been forgotten. They consist of a series of questions and answers. Often the questions are even real puzzles or simple guessing questions. By asking each other questions, the young people try to get to know each other.

It seems as if the origin could be found here of what the Indians call the svayamvara which is the choice of the husband by the woman. This custom is very persistent among the white Thai of the Phongtho region.

534 While vocal music is very prevalent in Laos, there exists also instrumental music which should not be neglected. We summarize here the excellent account given by his Highness Tiao Souvanna Phouma on Laotian music.

"There are three kinds of instruments: a) wind (the khouy and the khene), b) string (the So I and the So O), c) percussion (the Nang Nat and the Khong Vong).

The khene consists of a series of thin bamboos of various and decreasing lengths placed side by side in pairs like the flutes of Pan. Usually these are in seven consecutive rows. These bamboos are joined together by two half gourds attached with wax which form the blowing chamber and have a small circular opening to serve as mouthpiece. On the inside, the bamboos are pierced with holes. The most curious thing about the way the khene functions is that several notes are simultaneous and are absolutely continuous.

The khouy is a flute without any keys, generally made of bamboo and giving very clear tones.

The so, violins with two strings, consist of a long carved wooden handle and a sounding box. [87] The latter is a half coconut closed by

a thin wooden plate for the So O, or a simple cylinder of may dou whose extremity has a stretched boa skin for the So I. 534

The So Bang is nothing but a bamboo tube in a crude handle. Its register is small, and it is never used in an orchestra.

In all these violins, the bow is made of animal hair and passes between the strings.

Among the percussion instruments, the Nang Nat or Rang Nat is the most popular. It is a real xylophone and is made of wooden plates of different thicknesses suspended above a boat-shaped concave piece of wood which forms the sounding box.

The Khong Vong consists of sixteen bronze cymbals arranged on a semicircular frame made of rattan. In order to play these two instruments the musician uses two mallets whose head is made of elephant skin for the Khong Vong with which he strikes the keys by sliding them over the latter.

The Laotian orchestra has two forms: 1st) the Seb Noi or Ma Ho Ry consisting of several So, a varying number of khene, a Rang Nat, a Khong Vong and tambourines. The role of the Seb Noi is to accompany in an undertone a chorus or a solo; 2nd) the Seb Gnai (yai) is made up of the same instruments as the Seb Noi. Along with the so and the khene it also includes some large drums and a sort of clarinet or pi. This orchestra never accompanies singing. Its place is in the royal retinue or in a religious procession. Occasionally it is used in war dances of an episode taken from the Ramayana.

The performers always play from memory. Musicians are educated purely by ear and by intelligence.

[88] Laotian music uses only the octave with seven tones corresponding to the scale of a khene. There are a variety of tunes composed by individual musicians whose names are lost. At the present day the most popular is the Lam Vong. 533

The Theatre

With more ballet and pantomime than real theatre, the Laotian theatre, just as in Cambodia, is an intimate and complicated assembly of literature and music with orchestra and chorus, mimed scenes, dance and dialogue. The subjects of the classical theatre played at court are drawn from the Ramayana or other equally popular local works. The drama is presented with gestures learned and regulated beforehand, since each of the plastic phrases expressed by the actor or actress has necessarily a length determined by that of the musical phrase played by the orchestra or sung by the chorus. 536